the payment processor operable to exchange electronic messages with the point-of-sale terminal via the financial network and including means for crediting an indicia of monetary value to a corresponding intermediary account stored in a database coupled to the payment processor in response to receiving a payment message from the point-of-sale terminal, and further including interface means for communicating at least a recharge transaction to a vendor to credit the end-user account associated with the corresponding intermediary account in response to crediting the corresponding intermediary account.

40. (Twice Amended) A method for effecting payment for telephone services comprising:

establishing an intermediary account having a corresponding account identifier;

in a database coupled to a central payment processor, associating the intermediary account with an end-user's prepaid account maintained by a telecommunications vendor;

conducting a transaction comprising receiving a payment from the end-user at a point-of-sale together with the account identifier for loading value into the end-user's prepaid account;

electronically communicating data indicative of the transaction from the point-of-sale to the central payment processor;

in the central payment processor, validating the transaction data and transmitting a response to the point-of-sale; and

in the central payment processor, if the validating step results in approval of the transaction, sending a message to the telecommunications vendor for loading value into the end-user's associated prepaid account responsive to the payment transaction.

43. (Amended) A method according to claim 40 and further comprising designating an intermediary bank account and collecting an amount of money equal to the payment amount, subject to adjustment, from the point-of-sale merchant's bank account into the intermediary bank account by electronic funds transfer.

47. (Amended) A method according to claim 43 and further comprising settling the transaction by transferring an amount of money equal to the payment amount, subject

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to adjustment, from the intermediary bank account into the telecommunications vendor's bank account by electronic funds transfer.

48. (Twice Amended) A method for effecting payment for goods or services comprising:

providing a centralized payment processor;

establishing an intermediary account in a database that is coupled to the payment processor, the intermediary account having a corresponding account identifier;

conducting a payment transaction comprising receiving a payment together with the account identifier from the end-user at a point-of-sale;

communicating data indicative of the payment transaction from the point-of-sale to the centralized payment processor via a financial network;

in the payment processor, validating the payment transaction data and transmitting a response to the point-of-sale, said response including an indication of approval if the validating step results in approval of the transaction; and

in the payment processor, if the validating step results in approval of the transaction, crediting an indicia of monetary value to the corresponding intermediary account in response to the payment transaction.

50. (Amended) A method according to claim 48 further comprising associating the intermediary account with an end user account.

51. (Amended) A method according to 50 wherein the end user account is a pre-paid cellular phone account.

52. (Amended) A method according to claim 50 wherein the end user's account has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number.

53. (Amended) A method according to claim 52 wherein the valid credit card account number can be presented by the end user to purchase goods and services.

54. (Amended) A method according to claim 48 and further comprising designating an intermediary bank account and collecting an amount of money equal to the payment amount, subject to adjustment, from the point-of-sale merchant's bank account into the intermediary bank account by electronic funds transfer.

55. (Amended) A method according to claim 54 and further comprising settling the payment transaction by transferring an amount of money equal to the payment

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amount, subject to adjustment, from the intermediary bank account into the vendor's bank account by electronic funds transfer.

Add claims 56 to 65, as follows:

56. A method according to claim 53 wherein the user presents the credit card account number via the Internet, thereby enabling an anonymous purchase of goods or services via the Internet by first making a payment in person at a point of sale to load value into the corresponding intermediate account.

57. A system for effecting electronic payment according to claim 35 wherein the end user's account has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number.

58. A system for effecting electronic payment according to claim 35 wherein the end user's account has an account number corresponding to a valid credit card account number to facilitate electronic messaging over existing credit card association networks.

59. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment in the form of cash.

60. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment as a debit card transaction.

61. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein said receiving a payment from the end-user at the point-of-sale includes receiving the payment as a credit card transaction.

62. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein the point-of-sale is a vending machine.

63. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein the point-of-sale is a brick-and-mortar retail merchant site.

64. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein the point-of-sale is an automated teller machine (ATM).

65. A method for effecting payment according to claim 40 wherein said electronically communicating data includes interaction with an IVR system via telecommunications.

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